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TERED

ARGUS 2021  
LITERARY & ART  
MAGAZINE



UNIVERSITY OF  
THE SOUTH ALABAMA

ARGUS 2021

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## **THE STORY OF ARGUS**

According to Greek mythology, Argus was a giant with one hundred eyes. While some of his eyes "slept," he kept watch with the others. Hermes lulled Argus to sleep with his magic lyre and slew him with a stone. Upon finding the dead Argus, Hera, queen of the Gods, placed his eyes in the tail of a peacock. The cover of Argus traditionally represents this ancient legend handed down to us by the Greeks. The title was chosen to represent the different views and opinions of readers as though each perspective were an eye of the peacock.

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## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

**"This past year has given rise to life-leveled and thus, do not lend themselves to picking a theme for this yearly edition, a creative haven to express their personal any topics, especially the ones hard to better left on the page. With this in mind, a safe space that writers, photographers can release the stress that we all have experienced in this unprecedented year. May the pieces speak for themselves."**

life-altering changes that are unparal-  
lels to a one-word summary. When  
on, I wanted students to use Argus as a  
personal thoughts and feelings regarding  
to talk about aloud. Some things are  
in mind, I chose Unfiltered to represent  
others, and artists can use to catharti-  
have struggled to cope with during this  
s speak for themselves."

**Allie Atkinson**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Argus staff would like to thank Northwestern State for allowing our organization to serve the student body for 45 years. A huge thanks to this year's judges: Jacob Hammer and Daniel Hoefler (co-judges, poetry), Erin Lillo (prose), Anna Macijeski (fine art), and Lené Gary (photography) for their continual support and expertise provided these last two years. Our deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Rebecca Macijeski, Argus' advisor who has been a consistent support system throughout the editorial process. The Argus staff would like to express our gratitude to the students and staff who read our yearly editions. Lastly, thank you to submitters for trusting us to share your personal work because through you, Argus has a purpose.



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# MAHOGANY

Anonymous

My skin is my home,  
And I share it with others,  
They vary in tone;  
My sisters, my brothers,  
We shine our bronze,  
It's so much more than gold.  
We are beautiful, we are bold,  
We are a race of hope.  
They teach us to hate, our skin and our clothes.  
Our art, our culture, our hair, our nose.  
Please listen no more,  
My sisters, my brothers.  
They might hate us,  
But that will only give us power.  
This is who we are,  
Who I am,  
Not changing any time.  
To be black is a victory,  
Not a crime.



# SELF-COMPASSION

Kristen Culver

Self-compassion is not love of the self but love for the self.  
A misconception that pierces so deep  
and bares a face so insidious,  
a mother fails to soothe her developing daughter,  
her words instead festering a wound  
that bullies opened,  
screens fed,  
and only true comprehension of self-compassion  
might possibly heal.

"We don't want you to have a big head!"  
is where it started. This resentment,  
this cheek-burning shame  
at the flesh that refused to fall  
into the correct shape,  
the perfect shade,  
over taunt muscles –  
the  
healthy  
ideal.

How could I possibly love me?  
Men sneer, women laugh,  
the world pushes another diet forward,  
begging us to take care of ourselves more –  
love our bodies more –

by promising to help us shred  
most of it a part.  
So I do shred,  
and tear,  
and wish I could cut open this round belly  
to watch the yellow, antagonistic mush  
slide out to the floor below.  
But faces ravaged by disease  
and bodies torn open by life-saving hands,  
still receive sweet kisses,  
fierce hugs,  
and truly deserve I think,  
love without objection.

Self-compassion  
this enigma I could only wave away  
now seems not so out of reach  
or self-involved,  
but rather important  
and quite possibly –  
I see through desperate, hopeful eyes – my salvation!  
from myself.

# MULBERRY FEET

Kristen Culver

My heart swells at the new spring leaves  
on the berry-laden, bright green-leafed mulberry tree,  
its red and black berries bettered tasted on bare feet,  
ones too impatient to slip into shoes,  
quick to scamper under the mulberries merciful shade,  
speckled stains decorating the heels' underside –  
evidence of another successful day of hot joy.

And I attest mulberry juice never quite scrubs clean  
until late summer  
when choices end  
and the feel of wool replaces dewy grass  
which so well hid the mulberry squish,  
but never the mulberry feet.

That sneakers must once again support,  
comes now the end of mulberries above

and below

the frost whispering its return,

taking away with it for a season

mulberry feet.



## BODY LESSONS

Kristen Culver

CW: Eating Disorder, Fatmisia

I still don't know how  
mom could never say anything nice.  
She cried well enough at offenses, but  
hesitated not once at inflicting.

Mom could never say anything nice,  
Pretty is for small waists.  
And hesitated not once at inflicting –  
upon her daughter's splintered heart.

But I was a smart girl, I knew  
Mom meant to rip and tear,  
like the mother before her –  
Don't be a chubby prude, smile.

Mom meant to rip and tear,  
You'd fit in if you quit eating,  
Don't be a chubby prude, smile!  
yet I began to lose the fight.

I was sure I knew better, but  
her cuts fed a certain sense.

I tentatively chanted in the mirror,  
if only you were smaller, if only prettier.

Her cuts fed a certain sense,  
He'd want you if you'd kept to your diet,  
if only you were smaller, if only prettier!  
just stop eating.

But I got tired of hating this body,  
this mom.  
I sought forgiveness from the splintered girl and  
chose to cover the reflection.

This mom  
continued to churn the wheel of inverse thorns,  
while I chose to cover the reflection  
and learn new body lessons.

# CLAY

Kristina Simon

i want to be sculpted  
into someone who is kind.  
someone who isn't blind  
to humanity,  
to suffering

i want The Creator  
to create in me  
the urge to be gentle  
if possible, simple.  
make my hands able to  
heal others' wounds,  
make me a vessel  
a vase,  
to hold others' sorrows.

i want to be clay –  
soft to the touch.  
the water he uses to mold by matter  
shapes me to be humble  
i'm made to sway to His thoughts  
He made me in the womb;

every dimple  
and shape  
my body has,  
He made.

He called it  
Good.

He saw my form  
and it was perfect

the ceramicist  
gently placed me in life  
to resemble his craft.

for i shape people with my words and phrases  
the ones he gave me, of course.

i want Him to be the potter  
and i,  
the  
clay.

# MY LATE CHOIR TEACHER, WHO GAVE ME EARS THAT SEE

Kristina Simon

memories of you wash over me.  
sometimes these moments are vivid,  
this one seems foggy:

i watch your hands  
curve around the electric piano  
    with a Sensitivity  
yet unfamiliar touch

you play the organ every Sunday for mass  
    your fingers long to play chords and cadences  
    as they're familiar with ivory  
yet when you touch plastic  
your fingers forget where to go

your hands form notes i understand  
yet seem to have lost beauty

the choir giggles when we hear you exclaim  
"listen to the action! you can hear the damper touching  
the strings!"  
that new keyboard brought a vivacity to your playing

which only lasted a few more months

you –

you left without a melody or song.

when i hear music

i have gained your ears,

i tune them to listen to the complexities

you found

in the rawness of instruments

when i walk into choir-rooms,

i can sense your gentle harshness

the harmonies

you used to play

it's beautiful

yet i cannot help but sense

its eeriness

the tones beguile my senses

in these moments,

i remember what the world lost.



reflecting now,  
it doesn't seem right  
someone else was  
    playing your organ  
    at your funeral

# THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

Madison Moore

CW: Police brutality, racism. gun/knife violence

We get beat and bruised left and right

Shot down without a fight

Everyday it's all the same

We are the ones they always blame

"Oh, but he threatened me!"

It's never our side they want to see

How are we a danger to your life?

We weren't the ones with a gun or knife

Ahmaud, Floyd, and many more

This must be stopped at its core

So many bright futures were taken away

So many who can't be with us today

Did you ever think twice?

That for your actions we pay the price

You hear us beg for mercy

But continue to give us misery

We shouldn't have to worry about going out

It is for justice that we shout!

BANG BANG BANG!

The sound of countless bullets rang

But no one came to our defense

Does that make any sense???



It is time that we take a stand  
Since we never have the upper hand  
It is our time to protest  
No justice, no peace, no rest!  
Our voices WILL be heard  
We'll make it count, every word

# GREED

Carly Chandler

I want the world to swallow me,  
the dirt, the earth, the crust of the world.  
I want not a coffin around me but for soil  
to fill my lungs

I want my hair to craft a million bird nests  
And for my fingernails to be chipped away  
And mealworms to feast on the  
most unnecessary parts of me

I want my eyes to be stolen like precious gems  
And for my back to carry the simplicity of the soul  
And for the dimples in my cheeks to host  
the roots of a hundred blades of grass to come

I want my skin to melt away, returning to  
the creatures around me  
For the unwanted parts of me to nurture dead  
gardens back to life

I want the whispers on the wind to remind you of  
me, and

I want my fingers to tap on the floorboards of  
your house, a gentle melody  
reminding you that I'm with you  
And I want my lips to sink beneath your car,  
humming a song no radio could

I want my arms to break off into their bones,  
Clanging together like windchimes

And, one day, I want a tornado, slow and steady  
and unsure  
To push me around the world, for the earth to eat  
away at the meat of me  
until the necessary parts of me are all that  
remain

Until my song is little more than a promise  
in the air,  
following the clanging of my bones and the kisses  
on your fingertips

# HER

Gianna Gros

For years I waited to meet her, to claim her.  
Always was there this presence, this deep feeling  
That someone was out there, someone better,  
A person who truly represented me.

For years I found myself exhausted, struggling to fit this  
image  
One of toughness, roughness, masculinity,  
With my efforts failing to please those around me.  
I was lost, my inner self collapsing.  
Even so, I forced myself to continue fighting  
To be the man I was expected to become.  
But it only drew me closer to her.  
This hell that I was put through  
Only led to her constantly stealing my attention.  
She is my solace, the only truth I know.  
She is not a partner, not a soulmate.  
She is not a friend or an acquaintance.  
Not someone you can dream up  
No one who I expected anyone else to be.

As society tightened its hold on my throat

I let myself become someone alien.  
I let traditional beliefs dictate my existence  
Because I lacked the courage to fight against it.

Afraid, alone, ashamed  
Betrayed, belittled, blemished  
Conflicted, confined, clueless,  
Degraded, damaged, defective  
No number of words could ever convey  
The continuous brokenness I felt during those days.

The only other constant was her.  
No, not anyone whom I admire  
Not even a crush or some celebrity  
No one who I expected anyone else to be.

I felt the walls closing in around me  
The world trying to cram me in,  
To mold me to fit into this perfect box.  
My surroundings were growing with darkness,  
Shadows of men years before my time  
Completely enveloping me in an awful wave.

I was trapped. I was suffocating.  
The walls thickened, booming voices  
Piercing my psyche and berating me.  
My cage, my prison, held me hostage.

Mental persecution  
Perpetrated by myself, my peers, my world.  
For what? Because I couldn't let her go.  
And that was unacceptable to them.

But no longer will I hide.  
Fuck convention.  
I am independent of my environment.  
Determining my path is up to what I feel and think.  
And occupying my mind? Her.  
But why? Who is she?  
She...is me. And I am her.  
And I am proud of it.



# ODE TO THIS MATRIMONY

Kristen Culver

Today,  
you  
my closest confidant,  
the most longsuffering of audiences,  
who wants only a scratch on the back  
and a kiss of the lips,  
exists no longer  
as the man of my dreams.

Years in between  
I became  
like an old soft toy,  
once so embraced,  
anxious of leaving behind,  
a staple among the pillows,  
and careful not to tear –  
now I only gather cobwebs  
in the corner of a moldy, moth-eaten box –  
my absence quite survivable  
after all.

Words were exchanged

at improper volume:  
pleas,  
hurt,  
promises –  
but the heart of the matter,  
incomprehensible.

At the start –  
a husband  
of model perfection,  
free of errors,  
of my future expectations,  
his laugh was enough  
to caress pink scars.  
But I the dreamer  
could never imagine fact  
or its many ugly faces –  
I could not see the man  
standing in front of me  
so perplexed,  
so real –



I could only envision that smile  
and the love it so easily gave.

Yesterday,  
with tongues spent,  
and egos bruised,  
the handsome couple  
sought the end.  
Close to breaking,  
pulling back into their holes,  
they reached instead –  
for answers.

With answers  
they were surprised  
that  
words exchanged  
became words understood,  
that  
wounds torn open  
compassion relieved,  
and,

most inexplicably,  
bravery could replace neglect  
and appreciation – dreams.

With answers  
and affection  
a marriage –  
a real love –  
mended.

# SLOPPY JOES

Charles Bouchie

The long week is over and it's time to relax  
Dad comes home carrying a couple six packs  
Moms not far behind, kicking off her shoes  
Dinner is the topic and no one can choose.

Its dads turn to choose what's for dinner,  
He thinks and thinks until finally, a winner  
Sloppy Joes! Served with a side of French fries.  
Watching dad make the sauce I can't close my eyes.

The measure of ingredients were never exact  
If it was written in a book I'd have to redact.  
Mostly a feeling you just have to possess  
That first bite like a euphoria you can't express.

To this day I still cook those same Sloppy Joes.  
Feeding friends and family I make sure everyone knows.  
This is Mike's recipe, second to none with the sauce.  
Fingers covered in it like a rich brown gloss  
Cleaning myself and the kitchen, always the strenuous  
part.

This meal is something I will always hold close to heart.  
Mikes not here to cook that famous meal anymore  
But the memories in the kitchen I will always adore.

# IRRECONCILABLE

Kristen Culver

I learned today the worst kind of pain a person can feel  
is by their most cherished loved one  
cherishing a dark, horrid, little secret  
just a tad bit more.

Sure, some secrets are innocuous – reality TV viewed in  
the dark,  
greasy chili dog wrappers under the driver's seat,  
yellowed pages of a Fabio classic –  
but even those mild infidelities stung to an extent. A sharp  
prick in the chest.

If they loved you so much,  
said your smile could bring them to tears some mornings,  
that their life began with you,  
and all with such sincerity –  
how much did this cherished, abhorrent secret take?

What was really left for me?

There was no pain like this. Food taste like calories, water  
like copper.

The only joy is sleep.

Where dreams could carry away this ache – this gash in  
my torso that left me nearly in two –



for a few black hours.

The worst of it all though was the thoughts. Even in my sleep they raged – dulled – but urgent.

The thoughts made me shake, my hands grasp out with unwanted energy.

Over and over I played the moment of revelation.

To remember my own worthlessness in the aftermath. My inexcusable foolishness.

But now tonight one thought howled high over the others: decide.

To forgive. To move on.

This was the true heartbeat of the hurt.

But decisions were endings.

And my suffering, at least, timeless.

I could live here; I was starting to rationalize. I might deserve it for loving with so little caution.

Yet I knew better – although no one really knows better until they know better – but even I knew that!

A decision had to be made.

Idiocy, or a broken off soul.

The choice was impossible.

I cried out again – it was all so unfair!

I loved with consideration, with all cards on the table.

He loved just a hair shy.

I couldn't go on like this.

I had to choose but –

the reality,

my ravaged love –

were irreconcilable.

# TRAPPED

Chileigh Mitchell

Scared and vulnerable  
Stuck in these four walls  
The walls covered in scratches from all of her victims  
Blindfolded by life  
Only seeing her face  
A face so sunken in skin almost translucent  
Easier for other to not see  
But I see, she's taken hold of me  
In her clutches I shall stay  
begging,  
Screaming for help

I've realized my efforts were useless  
Only life has the power to show me that light  
In the dark now and forever I'll cry  
And shake, and hyperventilate  
I feel her skinny ice cold fingers wrap around my face  
In her clutches I shall stay  
Praying for the light to shine my way  
Hope is dead  
No means of escape is left

Scared, Vulnerable, and Hopeless

Darkness engulfed me

Life has shown me no sign of release

I have given in to her bosom

No longer phased by her sunken face, her ice cold fingers

or her translucent skin

In her clutches I shall stay until that dreadful day

The dreadful day that she is able to pull you in

# MATTER

Kristen Sonnier

dance with me baby, spin like the stars spin around the  
universe, speed up with the tempo, move

like it's pulling your puppet strings across the cosmos,  
your skirt twirls with us, around us,

your laugh rings like a bang, it's all I can hear, it's  
all anyone can hear- it created time  
and space,

look at me with eyes like a void, sucking me  
in, nothing can escape, it's  
impossible to cry when your eyes are black  
holes and not windows,

your smile is a moonbeam, whoever you face feels  
weightless, no longer tethered by  
gravity, tip toes graze the ground, cheeks rosy and  
sunburned,

*don't fly too close, Icarus, you'll melt your wings, you'll  
crash into the sun, and the sun will never leave you the  
same.*



## THE DANCER IN THE BOX

Jonathan Gennaro

A man in his shop arose  
and worked on his project unopposed.  
No interruption could stop him and  
no thought could distract him  
as he worked on his masterpiece so grim.  
A music box he whittled, fiddled, and meddled.  
Beautiful carvings on the side,  
with a dancer inside.  
Finished on his working table it lied.  
His hands did shake after what he did make,  
and before he went to go wake.  
The memory flew as the lullaby grew  
and as it gave the ballerina her entrance.  
There the man watched his failed repentance.  
But no better he felt.  
His feelings still dwelt for the dancer still presented  
and his dead wife which it represented.

# SONNET TO A PRETTY READHEADED GIRL

Colie Plaster

If I dissolve the chains that hold me back  
Should we be free to gaze upon the moon  
To brush your sleeve of leather jacket's black  
Against my wretched hand as I attune  
As golden fire does burn inside your eyes  
And crimson locks cascade from your sweet mind  
So fearsome is your densely veiled disguise  
I laugh and jest at those who doubt you kind  
If Courage be a friend I wish to know  
I shake her hand with use of words so bold  
and push through leagues of anxious feelings slow  
to prove that she's the one I hope to hold  
I humbly wear my heart upon my sleeve  
And hope it is your heart I will receive

## POLARITY

Kristina Simon

i become encapsulated  
by the idea of  
knowledge

how is it

i can string words and choruses together  
to form a symphony  
in someone's ears?

i become overwhelmed by  
the billowing excess of  
college work  
looming at my desk

it is dimly lit by the candle seek solace form

i find myself becoming lost when discussing philosophy  
i become one with the ancient

i ramble on –

which work of Plato's moves me

why Aquinas fought for the sacred and secular collision

the cascades of work then begin to crush me

i find myself immersed in the chaos and wondering  
is this what i want?

a flashback covers me  
the seminars sitting  
the seminars discussing  
time seemed to divorce from its intended flow

i settle to understand  
that knowledge requires my effort  
effort requires sacrifice  
sacrificing myself to know more –  
leads a life where the world surrounding me  
sees black and white

while im overwhelmingly  
gray

but  
gray is a weight i find more bearable than  
polarity

# WHAT IS BEAUTY?

Madison Moore

What is the definition of beauty?

It is the face in the mirror you see

It is what you so strive to always be

It's the gift of the great Aphrodite

It's the makeup you wear to be pretty

It is tall, it is short, it's thick or skinny

It is young, it is old, it's soft or wrinkly

But beauty is more than physical gain.

It is the strength you have throughout the pain

It's finding the sun in the midst of rain

It is the knowledge you hold inside your brain

It's NOT just something simple, shallow, plain

It's something Definition can't contain



# A PRAYER FROM SAPPHO

Krista Hanson

i sit in Aphrodite's garden:  
the myrtle tree  
with flowers of the gods  
sacred blossoms of love.  
roses birthed from her lover  
Adonis's blood and tears  
nourishing the ground  
from which they bloom.

i pull the words from my throat.  
my chest filled with longing.  
i beg of you, for you're the only one  
bless me  
do not curse me to an empty bed  
fill my arms

let my words cry out  
bless my bed with a love  
bring her to me

i do not ask of much  
but i will begin the war for her

as the men did for you.  
i will travel the seas  
from which you were birthed  
searching foreign lands for any mark of her.

bring her to me and  
the rest of my days may be dedicated to you.  
for you are the one only one

# THE DISCOURSE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

Madison Moore

Death:

Why am I always the bad guy people see?

Few hardly ever welcome me

I embrace those who've fallen asleep

Though loved ones left behind always weep

I take away from their pain

From sadness I have nothing to gain

Sometimes they grab me by the arm

My intent is not to cause harm

Whenever I come near

Those who sense me may have fear

But I'm only doing what I was told

I don't discriminate between young and old

Every time I ask myself why

I have to take those who die

It never ends, it's always the same

I'm the one who gets all the blame

Life:

You take away from what I give

Depriving them of the right to live

People hate me, too

Whether or not you believe it's true  
It's because I am not always fair  
Sometimes leaving them with great despair  
But you provide some with a sweet release  
Taking their suffering and giving them peace  
I give some breath they will barely use  
In my game many lose  
I know I can be tainted, far from pure  
I am unstable, I am unsure  
I am not always how I seem  
I can be a nightmare or a dream  
You don't have anything to hide  
Yet I wait to reveal the dark side

Death:

You may have a few flaws, maybe more  
But you are still the one they adore  
I will always be seen as the worst  
I am the one who has been cursed  
They won't appreciate me, it's a fact  
With a tortured soul I must repeat this endless act  
Because of me your treasure is lost

I am the ultimate cost  
I cannot exist without you  
We are forever bound, the tragic two  
Life:  
We will never separate  
This is our inevitable fate  
Both of us must accept it now  
Even though I don't know how  
We can't judge who's wrong or right  
There's no need to put up a fight  
And the last thing I say  
Is that we must do this day after day



# HINGE

Alexandra Robichaux

What about those days when you feel unbalanced,  
when you are racing to please others.

Time is of the essence they say,  
but then you remember time is your unbounded place of  
endlessness.

The earth will remain silently steady,  
but your mind keeps unhinging at every given moment.

Find solitude in your mind... hold it tight...  
never let it go.

You must keep your balance,  
or else you will erupt like a volcano waiting to spew.  
As long as you stay hinged,  
you will find a place in your mind that becomes your peace.

# JOINING THE CLUB

Shari Wilson

CW: Sexual Assault

We had understood that our bodies were tethered to the  
idea of giving

Us girls flying in the living room

sipping cheap boxed wine bought by the oldest in the  
room.

Most girls had experienced the nipple flick, finger lick,  
latex wet sweet nothings offered from some guy, that the  
words came almost too easily when describing the acts of  
service.

When the time came for her to gush about the ways she  
had given herself,

Swabbing the remains of her temporal lobe,  
regurgitating the exact placement of his mouth to fingers  
to breast to speech pattern.

the uncomfortable to the pleasure to the guilt and the re  
pulsiveness.

She looked around the room and each face conveyed a  
different meaning on the spectrum of  
sorrow to rage to silence.

*Someone has to tell her.*

And in a coup de grace like fashion,  
words whispered faded her smile to crinkled eyebrows.  
then it was understood.

The wind in her lungs left her and reunited with a stormy  
sky

She thought,

*How could someone take something like that from me?*

The girls all looking to the carpet  
set down their wine like some mother came in and told  
them to,

We had to tell her, some people just steal, and they don't  
always wear a mask like a bank robber  
in a movie.

And sometimes they make you think you are giving when  
they forced it from your own hand.

She thought,

*I am certain I could dispose of this body*

Looking at her hands that once held on so tightly to the  
monkey bars on a playground,  
tainted.

The blood vessels on her breast now blue like sewer wa  
ter.

Her soul now kept in a bottle around his neck, the cork  
super glued in.

Watching her grasp onto reality, we share stories of our  
mothers and mothers mothers and ourselves who have  
given without really giving.

She thought,

*Is this what it means to be a girl, never really belonging to  
yourself?*

And we explain in sorrowful sureness,  
We think so.

## WE ARE

Gianna Gros

*I am no role model, no idol*

*Mistakes drip off me like blood from a wound*

*Perfection is fortune, and I am a peasant*

*Emulating such a quality would be a wasted effort*

*Realism clings to me like a parasite*

*For I can never reach these incredible standards I set*

*Excelling in all is a tall order to ask of life*

*Comfort only comes in the form of knowing I am not alone*

*Though we may try, we are all **imperfect.***



# HAPPY-GO-LUCKY

Shari Wilson

More times than once my mother's church friends have called me, *sweeter than a peach pie at a county fair*

Those were also the same women who cry *bless your heart for such a handful*, to my mother every time I made myself known in any room

So when I get that, tone it down look from her I say "Mom I can not help that my high moments are high and my low moments are even higher..."

My dogmatic screeches are out of love because I want everyone to know my comfort is switched on the minute we make eye contact.

I can not help my messiness and tangled hair when God uses me as a whisk to stir the ingredients for a heavenly birthday cake.

I say, *mom*, do you know what it's like to have people send a rain dance into the earth for the day you have your parade scheduled?

They have to know those giant air balloons are going down 34th street whether they like it or not.

I will wear the face of my enemies in a locket around my heart,

And maybe even marry them one day.

I apologize for my unapologetic naivety; I can never

pass up a bowl of free suckers when I see my face on all of them. I think I just see myself as sweet and a sucker. Sweet and stuck to a stick ready to dissolve at any sign of tenderness.

Joy creeps into my soul with the precision of a fosse dancer and erupts out of me like a singing volcano, covering all that surrounds me in my hot brain lava joy.

Most of the red lights I stop at are when I am making a right turn and I assume everyone at the intersection wants to go faster too

I say, mom, Have you ever touched the sun, enough to bottle some of him up and wear it around your neck, and pull it out when you get too cold in the supermarket?

Momma, I walk my daily commute to school passing gardeners that show me, even if it affects no one it doesn't hurt to try and make things as beautiful as we would like them to be.

But

I know my mother, and she is just worried about me pouring the liquid of my heart into people who present themselves as a sifter.

And I tell my momma, life is not one big cake that has to come out of the bundt perfectly every time, I have a lot more cake mix in my bowl.

# CALLING

Carly Chandler

Out of their own goodness,  
the stars rang like telephones, a  
buzzing in my ear, reminding me that  
day had turned to night and that the world was  
Turning, changing, churning.

Spinning round and round until this place  
makes sense again, makes me whole  
makes the cake taste a little sweeter,  
drizzled with the sickness of the soul, the  
artificial command ringing like telephones,  
buzzing in my ear, reminding me that  
night has turned to day.

Deathless eyes unchanging even as winter  
transitions to spring, jumps into summer, fades  
into fall, and out of their own goodness,  
the world is a little more beautiful

Polyneices and His Stolen Crown

Can you hear me, brother? Should you hear the scorn  
of ages to come, the ridicule upon my name?

I have seen the days not yet past, learned the mockery  
scholars will throw upon our names.

Infernal, immortal immensity blighting our reputation

as though your parading with my title every other year  
would damper our standing less than the sin of our father  
before us?

Can you see me, brother? Should you see the laurel of  
thorns  
hung around my neck? Sliced and defiled,  
my bones buried once, half-covered in ash and born again  
when the world thrust me forth for the last time. Should  
you see the weight of my infamy, carried on my chest.  
A hero's journey, a King's burial were too much to ask?  
A stolen crown is the legacy that follows me, wrath and  
pride  
and all the foolishness of the gods that lead our hatred to  
pool  
under our eyes and fill our sight

Can you feel me, brother? On your departure from this  
earth, can you  
feel the loneliness that plagues what remains of me?  
The forgotten memory of the Kings of Thebes, forced to  
abdicate before he took his place – was this the legacy  
you

intended us to share, brother? You rest now a journey's  
length away from  
me and still I think of nothing but the blood I would have  
shed  
to see your end

Can you know me, brother? Do you remember a time  
without the  
heavy burden of Thebes on your shoulders, when the sev-  
en gathered to strike you down?

Do you remember the promise we made, brother, son of  
Oedipus?

Should you know the face of your brother that day, would  
you not recognize me now?

The earth gnawing at my skin until the hollow rage rings  
around the horizon like  
moot arguments, filled with all the failures of our lifetimes  
and those before us.

Can you know my suffering? Or do you rest in a King's  
grave, with a crown not  
crafted for your tender skull upon your head?



# THE GIRL WITH TOO MUCH TO SAY

Shari Wilson

after one too many drinks  
 she hoists her shirt into a knot to release the constriction  
 that presses her waist,  
 her voice like a cup of coffee topped with buttercream  
 icing  
 everyone remains calm but they feel as if they are looking  
 into the inside of the world trade  
 center  
 her loud manic 2000s vernacular  
 "like, she like, does this like, thing like with her, voice"  
 makes us all feel secondary when she stands next to us  
 her heated curls, now fallen up, pierces the air as stands  
 erect on her head, not even they can be  
 controlled by her touch  
 she waves her chipped nail polished hand around to catch  
 the filler words people say to push her  
 away, and chews them up in their face,  
 and somehow keeping direct contact with everyone at  
 once she says,  
*you will listen to me*

she talks about the wine, and what she ate for breakfast,  
and *did you know Lucy and Desi actually hated each other?*

Her hair sticks to her lip gloss

and she never moves it unless it affects the words produced from her athletic lips.

Breathing aimlessly into the ache of the American dream

Her chronic oversharing and vital way of going about the room like she is a game show host with

a dirty joke up her sleeve has caused the others' fight or flight instincts to chip into their already dazed state

she has every right to be this beautiful.

she reminds us of who we thought we could be.

but, in her sobering slurs, turned back into MLA format,

she stands in the kitchen blinking double time

and we begin to leave the party.

She has nothing left to offer us,

and as she hangs off of the sink drinking water from the kitchen tap she sighs,

*Will someone please listen to me.*

# JUST FOR US

Izzy Plauche

I'm holding hands with this girl at twelve-thirty at night  
 while we lay on our backs in my driveway  
 just to watch the stars  
 Words are slipping against the pebbles under our skin and  
 our laughter is smooth and soft  
 She tells me what magic tastes like (watermelon and hot  
 chocolate)  
 and I list out the things I've fallen in love with (California  
 mountains and fall bonfires and early  
 morning farmers markets)  
 We're counting shooting stars as they fall because they're  
 falling just for us and everything  
 finally seems bright and alive and electric  
 While we hold desperately to the ground beneath us  
 the galaxy turns wildly with two girls on its axis and they  
 laugh like children on a merry-go-round  
 To be so in love with the stars  
 To be so in love with the moments you've been given  
 You could never convince me that the definition of beauty  
 isn't to be found right here  
 on our backs in my driveway  
 watching the universe spin just for us

# MY LOVER AS AN ARCHITECT (FOR OLIVIA GATWOOD)

Shari Wilson

CW: Lewd

I look up with great admiration and wonder on the busiest  
street in the city.

Look how much detail he puts into each cut of glass on  
this tall and slim skyscraper

I bet he wishes he could fuck the sky.

When we were young the buildings came to him easily,  
the rock and columns flowed from his  
charcoal pencil tip onto the page,

We tango on the hardwood floors of the kitchen layout  
and laugh at the way he compares the fat rolls down my  
back to the ridges in the Sidney Opera House.

He stands in the threshold of the doorway and makes me  
believe he could never hurt me,

Until order averts his eyes and soon he is engineering a  
step by step stir fry that we have for dinner *first you add  
the carrots then the mushrooms so they don't get too sog  
gy and let the zucchini be the last thing you add or the dish  
will be too slimy and I'll be forced to redirect my hunger*  
And he designs the precise rhythm of my blowjobs but

doesn't finish unless I follow the process as stated *first palm, then lips, then curtains of spit.*

My lover sits on the couch creating open concepts of his most prized design yet,

I am not allowed to see.

Even the hum from my voice in the other room compels him to slam his book closed like a car door in a midnight parking garage.

My friends tell me he will choose her over me every time.

So, I trace his sketches and build myself to mimic her quadrilateral tallness,

I chew steel and plywood for breakfast to sharpen and fill the most hallow parts of my mind,

I arch my back even deeper than the Gateway Arch, so he could feel the reason why he is supposed to love me,

because I try, because I built myself in his image.

I remember he told me he loved that I didn't take up too much space

And what I heard was that I was sustainable,

That I am good for his environment.

I tell my friends I can't help but melt at the way he plays



with the lighting in me and his impression on my exterior façade.

If he could look into the window of my mind and see that I am willing to de-brick all the walls of my being so that he may re-layer them in the way that would work for him.

My lover once made a blueprint of our romance to every last detail.

He noted how the contrast will be received by the colors  
To which the pattern of lines and curves were infinite  
Maybe we fall in love with the people who see us worthy  
of construction where we once thought we were a dry and  
barren foundation.

Now I am sitting on the hardwood in a ball wondering if I  
could have the power to crash through 40 floors

# COLD COFFEE CONFESSION

Aubrey Howell

I'm sorry for how I treated you  
I'm more than sorry I hurt your soul  
At first I crave the indulgence of a hot new brew  
Eventually left out like a cold cup of joe

I felt safe; you made me comfortable  
Your hands my hips; all too close.  
Smell of sweet cream leaving our lips  
A small house brew dark roast

I crave this sense of life  
Molding the seconds like clay  
How many cups of coffee did it take that night  
for me to still think about you to this day?

We fit 12 people in that fucking bed  
It was like a steady passing of time  
And even that was more comfortable  
than the absence of your hand in mine  
I'm sorry for how I treated you  
I'm more than sorry I hurt your soul

Your smile ticking seconds onto my lips  
Grinding gears in my gut  
The cream and sugar in my cup  
And a selfish intent to stir it up

# JEALOUSY

Izzy Plauche

There are seven different kinds of love in the Greek language

Eros for romantic love

Agape for universal love

Philia for the love between friends

Plato believed that the best kind of love was Philia born from Eros

He believed that friends were meant to help you live truer, fuller lives

That the love of these friends made you whole

Complete

He knew that soulmates can be platonic and our journey would be ever richer with the people we

choose standing by us

A life without Philia is a life gone to waste

Now here's the truth

I've been sitting in an empty hole in the spider's web

Close enough to see the strands of everyone's lives connect

Close enough to pluck each strand and watch the vibrations skitter along

But if I think about it

I realize that makes me no more than a rain drop

So I must be made out of water because every time they  
look my way  
I swear they stare right through me  
I don't blame them  
It's hard to talk to a ghost  
Especially after you've seen them walk through walls  
So I've been dead for quite some time now  
And you'd think that I would be used to being forgotten  
But there is simply no way  
To get used to watching everyone fall in love with each  
other  
And realize that ghosts are only good for background  
characters  
It must feel so good  
To be so entrenched in the lives of the people around you  
To be thought of and talked about and loved  
They plait stardust in each other's hair and press warm,  
sticky fingertips against the vertebrae in  
their spines  
They all sit snugly in each other's spiderwebs and hold tight  
It must feel so good  
To be that Known  
I think Philia must taste like whiskey



Like a bonfire under the stars  
 Like too many people piled in the backseat  
 Windows down and voices loud  
 I think Philia must be soulmates of the best kind because  
 friends that love without reservation or  
 fear or boundaries must feel like swallowing a galaxy and  
 to be so in love with the people around  
 you, to reach out and twine your fingers in their hair and  
 trace sunflowers on their thighs must  
 feel like religion  
 But to put it simply  
 Brutally  
 Honestly  
 I am jealous of all of you  
 There is a special kind of love that comes with being Known  
 so fully  
 And I realize it's hard to Know a ghost  
 But to at least be seen  
 I'm just a memory  
 A background character  
 Just the raindrops in the spider's web  
 I know that I cannot force Philia from people who don't  
 have the room for it

But I'm tired of walking through walls  
Even ghosts want to be seen sometimes

# SAND

Carly Chandler

*Kissing you is like seeing the stars*, she whispers to me  
in the dead of night, shrouded only in her veil she touches  
me

like no other, her voice like sand as she sings,  
*I'm going to dream about you, lover*

Her voice is like sand as she sings me a lullaby  
of whispers on the wind on ethereal moments  
the circles under her eyes pool of the moon

*Kissing you is like seeing the stars*, she  
swears

She steals dreams like she steals kisses,  
with reckless abandon and tired smiles, her voice  
like sand as she lies

stealing, thieving, losing, loving

She comes in the dead of night, shrouded only in her veil  
as she touches me with reckless abandon and tired smiles  
her voice like sand as she sings me a lullaby,  
the song of dreams she's taken

*Kissing you is like seeing the stars, she swears,*  
as she steals the dreams from all the others,  
her voice like sand on the wind as she kisses  
the pools under my eyes

## THE DANCE

Jennifer Wadkins

CW: Mental illness, Medication

Sometimes I wonder  
Why I even try  
I have this monster inside me  
Until the day I die.

There is no cure for me  
Only meds to keep me level  
I keep it all bottled up inside  
And I feel like I'm dancing with the devil.

When I'm manic you make life  
Impossible to get through  
No sleep, wired brain, trigger temper  
Make it hard or others to love me too.

The depression cycle isn't  
Easier since it always brings me down  
Sleep all day and night, feeling lower than dirt  
Not wanting to leave the house for town.

You ruin everything for me like



Relationships and such  
It hurts to be feared all the time  
And it gets to be too much.

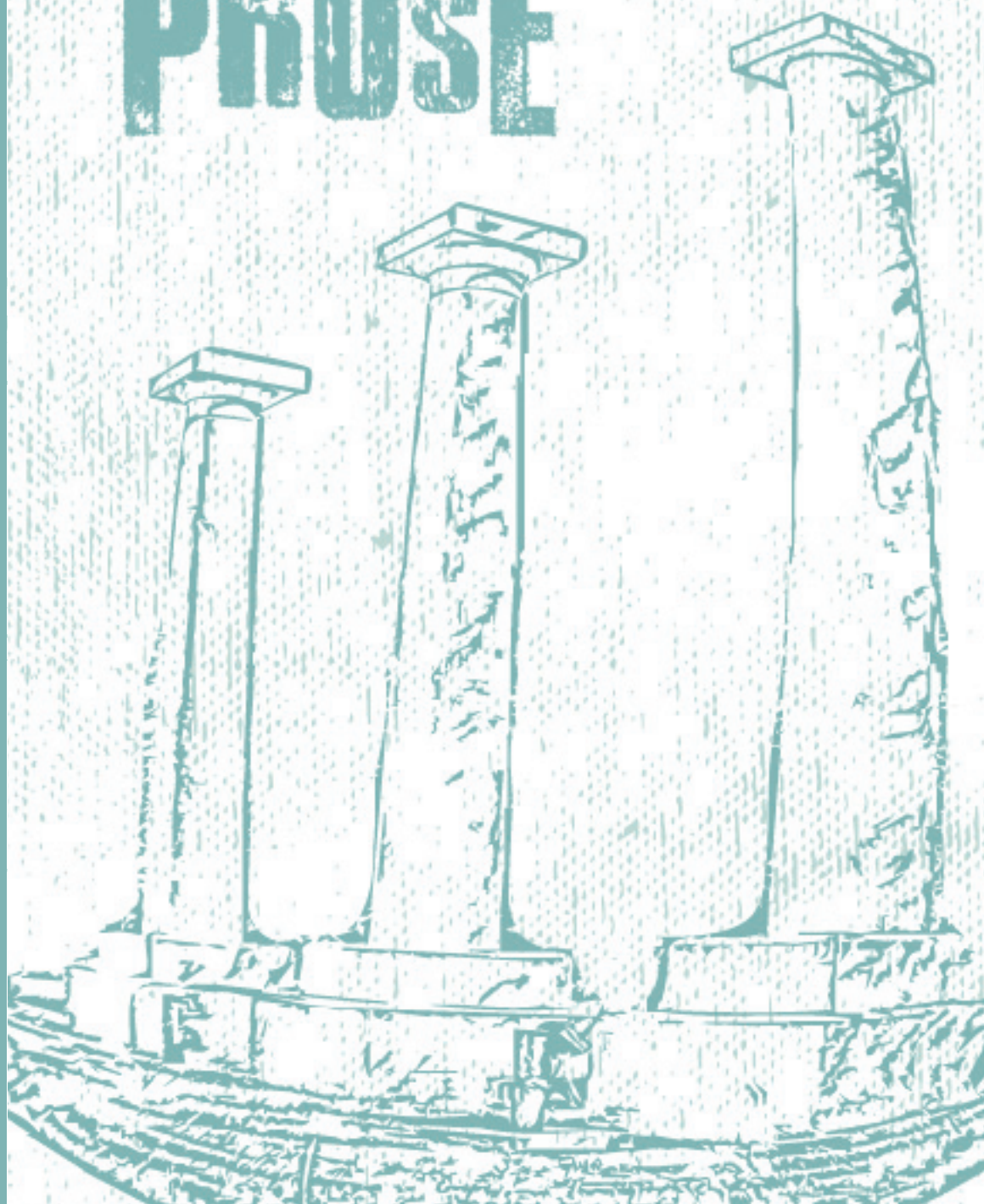
You define my personality at times  
And push me to my limit  
I take these meds to be normal  
Because that is my commitment.

I wish one day they find a way  
To make you disappear  
Until then I'm stuck with a secret  
Known only by ones that I hold dear.

One day bipolar  
Your day will come  
I'll be shouting from the rooftops  
For our devil dance will be done!!!!



# PROSE



## WAITRESS

Izzy Plauche

CW: Violence

I'm very good at my job. I've never heard any management say it outright, of course. Then they'd be playing favorites, and obviously, that's not really fair. But I know I am. I wouldn't be here if I wasn't.

This place is everyone's favorite in town. The service is impeccable, the massive picture windows have the best view of the river, and the food is absolutely to die for. Anyone and everyone has been here at least three times in their lives. You can't live here and not come in. It took me two years to get an interview and another four months of more interviews and training before they let me on the floor. So, of course, I'm not letting something as simple as ringing in the wrong salad dressing one too many times get me thrown on the sidewalk with my empty apron in hand. Mistakes really aren't in my forte and at a restaurant like this, it's best to avoid them anyway.

I smile at one of our line cooks: a tall, dark-skinned man named Kirkland who's been here longer than I've been alive. I make sure to use all my teeth. His crow's feet crinkle

in return.

One by one, the dinner shift servers trickle in after me, all in the same long black pants and button-up shirts. The air outside is sticky and heavy and each one of them has their sleeves rolled up to the elbow.

I bump hips with Abe and flash him another wide grin. "How was the show?" Abe is in a college theater, and he hasn't stopped talking about their Mary Poppins show for months. He's moving about making fresh pots of coffee but stops to smile at me.

"Absolutely amazing. Opening night pulled a full house and the entire show went perfectly."

"Even the umbrella scene?"

He laughs. "Especially the umbrella scene."

He's not even looking at the coffee machine as he talks; his hands move on their own in a series of muscle memory. Abe works nearly as much as I do. It shows in the way his black nail polish needs to be retouched every other



shift and the broken spine on his server's book. He jokes all the time that we should both put cots in the storage room and just sleep here since we pretty much never leave anyway.

I study my own nails for any chips or cracks. I'm the only server allowed to wear red polish. The others are only permitted the company standard: black. I sported that same color for three years before I was offered the red. And with lipstick to match. I take it very seriously, making sure my nails are always straight and unbroken and my lipstick even, full, perfect. I have to. They mark me.

The kitchen around me has already started to bustle. Mr. John is my favorite of the kitchen managers, and I find him at the front, finishing prep work and pulling tickets out the window. I glance though to doors to the dining floor, not surprised by the steadily rising chatter from guests streaming in.

In all my years here, I don't think we've ever had a "slow hour." A lot of the other servers would grumble and

complain about the lack of a break if they had the time or the breath, but I consider it a testament to the restaurant's reputation, to our food, and our service. There's just something...special about this place that people can't get enough of.

Already, I see the tables in my section beginning to fill as the hostess, Bailey, seats them. I take one deep, centered breath and tie my apron around my waist tight enough to bruise. Abe grins at me and knocks our elbows together.

"Showtime."

It is an hour before closing when they show up. All of my tables were great. They see the red on my nails, on my lips, and something would light across their eyes. They know me. They know how things are run.

I joke with them and make recommendations and bring them plate after plate after plate. No one leaves unhappy and no one leaves a tip that won't weigh heavy in

my pockets. And no one leaves without going on and on and on about how amazing the food was, how they loved everything, and how it was all just to die for.

I'm waiting in the kitchen, filling cups of ketchup and honey mustard when Maddie throws the swinging doors open. "This is the third time. And now she wants it paid for. And not before she called me 'a stupid little girl!'" She slams the half-eaten plate in her hand on the counter next to John. "Where's Aida?"

The kitchen goes silent for exactly two seconds. "I'm right here." It's quiet enough that I don't have to raise my voice to be heard. Just as quickly as they stopped, everyone goes back to bustling about, dressing burgers and grilling steaks, anything to look like they don't know what's coming.

Maddie turns to me and I beat her to the question. "Table 308?"

"Of course."

"Just the woman?"

She swings her long ponytail over her shoulder. "No, the husband is being a bitch, too."

I glance at Mr. John who's watching us with an almost bored expression. "So that's two coming back. It's been a while, so there should be room."

He wipes a trickle of sweat off his temple. The kitchen A.C. broke a week ago and it's always much hotter back here than in the front. "Yeah, we did inventory and cleaned everything out last week."

I rap my knuckles twice against the counter and tighten my apron with a deep breath.

"Showtime."

The dining room is silent. Only the soft, jazzy music over the speakers and the sounds of the kitchen behind me make any noise. Everyone is quiet, staring at the floor or their plates or one of the walls. No one is looking at table

308.

I see a few eyes flit to me, my red nails, and my red lipstick before back down. They know me. They know how things are run. The couple at 308 are the only ones not in stock-still silence. They're both glancing confusedly back and forth at the tables around them. My steps make no sound.

"I heard there was a problem?" I'm using my server voice, nice and even and polite. They both take me in for a moment before she starts.

"You must be the manager. Well, no insult to your staff, but that little waitress we had was completely incompetent. We've had to send our food back three times!"

"And you really need to talk to your kitchen staff." The husband chimes in. "Really, you'd think that they'd be able to get simple things like our salads right—"

"The salad you ordered was not on our menu. You asked Maddie to modify one of our salads into something completely different." I'm still using my server voice, but it's



tighter now. The rest of the room stops breathing.

“Yes—but, but still it can’t really be that hard and my soup—”

It’s part of my job to know exactly every single out-of-the-ordinary modification, wrong drink, or send back that each server has. 308 had been especially difficult all night. “Ma’am, you sent your soup back three times because it wasn’t hot enough. We reheated it for you as much as we could. Would you like us to boil it for you next time? We can do that if you’d like. You probably wouldn’t be able to talk much afterwards, but I fail to see the problem with that.”

They both gape at me, mouths opening and closing like fish. “You are quite rude! This entire place has been horrible to us! I’m going to contact whoever owns this franchise—”

“No ma’am. You won’t.” A teenage boy at the next table over drops his head next to his plate. I’m longer using my server voice.

"I absolutely will! I don't know who you think you are, try—"

She doesn't get to finish before I slide the slender knife from my waistband and bury it in her neck. Her eyes go wide, and her hands scrabble across her skin. I give her husband exactly three seconds of shock before I take a step around the table and drive the knife through his temple. He slumps to the floor in a heap. The wide-eyed, empty look of shock is still frozen in perfect preservation across his face.

The woman is still alive, making a wretched gurgling noise. She slides off her chair and onto the floor, eyes rolling until they land on her dead husband. His blood is warm and pooling into my shoes. I crouch next to her, waiting for her eyes to roll their way up to mine.

"You'll have to excuse me. Usually, I don't make this big of a mess."

Our newest hire, Jada, is standing in the very corner of my vision. Even from here I can see her shaking. Each

new hire is trained, prepped, and given as much ground-work as possible. But everyone remembers their first. I didn't stop shaking for an hour after my first, when the red belonged to my predecessor Jen. There was blood in in her long, beautiful, blonde hair.

When it was my turn behind the knife, I threw up for half an hour. I thought of that girl now, the red still fresh on her nails and heart in her throat, and almost laughed. If I even tried to feel a pulse in my wrist now, I'd come up dry.

Troy, our dish boy, is already wheeling a mop and a roll of trash bags over. I drag a finger through the puddle at my feet. Her eyes, bulging and bloodshot and terrified, search the room, desperate. My finger is jammed between my lips and gums, and iron tastes sweet on my tongue.

"You know this is your own fault, right? You did this." Her fingers, wet and sticky and warm, scratch hopelessly at my arm. "I wish I could say sorry." I sigh in a heavy, irritated sort of way. Her eyes are finally starting to dim, the muscles around her jaw beginning to slack. I slid my fingers from

my mouth to pry one of her dropping eyelids open.

"Do us all a favor. Try not to be bitch in the afterlife."

I'm too tired and worn to wait and see if she even registers the words, and I push off my knees to stand. When this was all still new, when my heart still lodged itself in my throat, my veins felt cold, the pure adrenaline of it all flooding my system. I felt alive, I felt bright, I felt beautiful.

Now, hefting the bodies onto the cart and rolling them to the back, I didn't feel the ice in my veins, the bottom-out, free-fall swoop; I didn't feel beautiful.

Troy and I grimace at the weight of them as we load each one onto the back table. Kirkland is waiting; the heavy, whizzing saw already alive in his hands. Watching him work, blood still sharp on my teeth and thick under my nails, I don't feel beautiful. But I don't miss the girl who did.

We all finish the shift with ease. The dining room resumes its usual chatter and laughter and warmth like nothing ever happened, with the exception of the specific,

pointed way everyone is ignoring Troy, and his mop, and the red, sudsy bucket next to him.

We end the night with aprons full of tips and ears full of praise. "Tell the chef it was seasoned to perfection!"; "You've been so nice to us tonight, thank you!"; "We love coming here, everything is always so fresh!"

One by one, each server finishes cleaning their sections, sweeping floors, and counting cash.

"Alright, I'm done." Abe sighs heavily and cracks his neck both ways before clocking out.

"Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

As usual, I'm the last server left. I finish cleaning up the front and closing the patio before I finally count out all my tips and turn in my checks. Mr. John glances my way.

"You're leaving?"

"Yep. Done for the night."



He nods, dropping the last of his utensils in a dish bucket. “Hey, I know I’m not really supposed to say this,” he wipes his hands on a dish rag and crosses his arms over his chest, “but you did good today.”

It’s warm outside. Not unbearable, but it sits heavy in the air. The soles of my shoes are still sticky as I drop heavily onto the stoop to the back door. Even though it’s late, the city around us is always awake. Cars rush by and the streetlights set everything awash in orange and white. People are laughing in the bar next door, music vibrating up the asphalt.

I don’t feel beautiful. I feel dangerous. And a smile pulls across my lips. Because I’ve come to understand that those two are almost the exact same thing.

Another line of cars rush past, the breeze pulling at my hair, and I tip my head back to the night sky. Even though my legs ache, my shoulders are heavy, and my feet feel bruised, I know I wouldn’t trade this—any of it, all of it—for anything. It’s become who I am now. This restaurant,

the people, this job, it's my life. And I'm not sure of who I'd be without it.

I sigh contentedly and stand, dusting off my pants. I closed the restaurant tonight as usual, and in typical fashion, I'll be the one to open it in the morning. I laugh quietly to myself, swinging my keys and slipping off into the dark parking lot.

I'm very good at my job.

## SECRETS ARE FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE SOMETHING TO HIDE

Kaylon Willoughby

We're a small town. Hardly more than 1,000 people, and most of us know each other.

There's not much crime, hardly any drama beyond who stole whose grandmama's recipe, and we're quite self-sufficient, so, for the most part, we just keep to ourselves. It's simple, but we like it like that. It's the only way we know.

We didn't know what to do with the body when it appeared. We'd never seen anything like it, all twisted beyond recognition, as if it was something we'd recognize in the first place. We were frightened and out of our depths, so we did what anyone would do with some strange thing they were frightened of and unsure how to deal with: we buried it.

That was a mistake.

The ground where it was buried turned black, and all the animals in the area died.

Anyone who went near it started bleeding out of their eyes and ears. What were we supposed to make of that? It's not

exactly something you'd take to the walk-in clinic. We tried to ignore it, hoped nature would take over and it would go away on its own with time, but teenagers kept daring each other to go out there—we all know how teenagers are—, so eventually, we just put up a warning sign and went about our business, trying to forget the whole thing. Anyone who went sticking their nose in something like that deserved what was coming to them. After a while, even the teenagers didn't want to risk it, so it worked for a time. The problem was nature isn't what took over. The blackness started spreading. It enveloped the trees, the rocks, the soil, all the birds, and squirrels, and insects, and snakes, and coyotes, and bobcats, and all the other creatures in the forest. The sky turned an odd gray color over that one spot. We pretended not to notice. When the children asked how come the shadows were creeping in, we ignored them or pretended not to know what they were talking about. If anyone tried to explain, they were shamed for exposing the younglings to adult things like that. The kids started talking about it on the playground, whispering when the adults weren't

looking, as children always do. They said the Shadow Man was coming for us all, coming to swallow us whole and spit us back out as zombies and vampires and werewolves.

A reporter came poking around, asking questions. No one would talk to him, but he was determined to get to the bottom of it. He was determined to figure out the truth. We didn't know why. We didn't know how he even knew to come to our town. Probably because no one cared to ask. We all just wanted him to leave, so we became quite hostile. Slamming doors in his face, hurling insults and—when the insults didn't work—whatever was in our hands at the time.

Rocks, newspapers, bricks, toys, vacuum cleaners, and the like. He caught a few bruises, but still, he stuck around, trying to get answers out of someone, anyone. It wasn't a problem for long, though. He disappeared after a few weeks. Johnsson said he saw the guy headed south towards the woods around 3 o'clock, but Smith swore he didn't see nobody down there all day.



The darkness started creeping in at the edges, seeping into the roads, the buildings, the very foundation of our town. The whole sky turned gray. People started bleeding again, started getting real sick. A few babies died. Pets that didn't keel over had to be put down because they kept attacking their owners. The children sang a song about it:

The Shadow Man is coming

So you'd better run and hide

The Shadow Man is coming

And he's gonna open wide

He'll gulp you down

And burp real loud

and say "that hit the spot"

Then keep on going through the town  
to see what else we've got

The adults tried to put a stop to this, but by then there was nothing they could really do.

The children began misbehaving more frequently, growing violent with the adults and one another. Accidents became more frequent. A few were fatal: one little girl got pushed off a bridge by her friends, banging her head against a rock at the bottom. The river washed her away.

Another one got a hold of his daddy's gun. A whole bunch got into the kitchen knives, which led to several mutilations. We all sort of started to feel like maybe we ought to do something, but we weren't sure what. It was too late by then, and everyone was afraid to speak up.

We all started getting angry—the adults too. People lashed out at each other, brother versus brother, neighbor versus neighbor. People were killing their own kin over chicken sandwiches and whose turn it was to do the dishes. After about the fifth act of violence, the police didn't even bother anymore. Everyone just sorta ran wild. The worst part is that we didn't even notice. It all felt normal, natural. Like we were animals, just following our instincts, no matter how bloody.

Some feds started poking around. That's when it got real bad. The first two who came—partners, they were—ended up headless in the ditch outside a diner. A couple more showed up not long after. Feds tend to notice when their own go missing. One of the new guys got bludgeoned in the grocery store, but his partner got away. Must've reported to base. Next thing, the whole town was swarming with them, most in hazmat suits, and an all-out gunfight broke out on main street. Twelve people ended up dead, and all of us who were left got hauled in here. It's probably what we deserve, after all that. This sterile facility, these bright fluorescents, cameras on our every move. Hell, we probably deserve worse after all the hell we gave 'em. I think the only reason any of us were taken alive is because they want to run studies. Analyze the effects of the darkness, figure out what it is, how it works. How long until it wears off.

If it can be useful.

Some of us have come to our senses, others will still

try to rip the face off of anybody who sneezes in their presence.

The Feds are looking for the body. Problem is, nobody can stay in town for long without going rabid. The hazmat suits help, but not by much. They've taken to trying to drop people in from the air. It would help if we'd tell them where the body is buried. Nobody will do it. We don't like giving up our secrets, even when they scare us. Like to take care of our own problems. The Feds think that's pretty stupid, seeing as how the darkness is spreading beyond our town limits, even as we speak. They figure if they don't find a way to control it, it'll affect a whole lot more than just us. We still won't tell. We figure that's not really our problem or our business.

That's probably a mistake, too.

# I WILL BE MY OWN LIGHTHOUSE WHOSE LIGHTS WILL NEVER GO OUT

Lili Bedoya

Words come easy because of how definite they are. They are certain, and once they are out of your brain, they are real. This unambiguity is what has always drawn me to them, the way that they can reassure me when everything else is uncertain. For me, certainty has been a lighthouse in which the lights no longer work, and ships come so close to land only to turn in the opposite direction, unsure of where to go next or how to get home. My brain is the lighthouse, so when words come, I drive them out—hands on a keyboard like shaky fists clutching a steering wheel when the headlights go out.

Childhood memories do not come out like words do; they stick to the insides of my brain like the last drops of honey in an almost-empty jar. When they do visit, it is not sweet like honey but definitely sticky. They stick like gum to the chewed-up resemblance of my brain, what's left after the flavor has run out, and I cannot taste anything anymore. What is left?

A yearning that has always been present in all my



memories, an unspoken desire that permeates the stickiness. And when I lie down to sleep, I swirl through wistful memories like a streak of strawberry through vanilla soft-served ice cream. The present is the vanilla, mostly contemporary but streaked by this bygone pinkish-red that turns it all into a gooey, murky brown when stirred about. Yet there are certain things that don't feel muggy, that are wonderful with their delicious certainty. A precious routine all dressed up as a purple mug, filled with a beautiful, definite brown liquid each morning that doesn't feel like melted ice cream because it's the color of her eyes, the girl who loves me even when I remember or don't, when I deserve it or don't. I delight in this never-ending present, this mouthwatering promise that no matter what tomorrow holds or where we are, I will always start the morning with this warm cup of coffee that, as a certain angle of sunlight hits it, appears like the shining beacon of a lighthouse.

And moments like these help me to remember other fragments, other pieces of time that grasp my fingertips like

a trick-or-treating child. Times like the summer after sixth grade when my mother forced me to go to 4-H camp even though I'm terribly introverted and dreaded every day leading up to it. But I had a great time. And although I thought I would remember it forever, the memory is faded and tucked away into a photo album I purchased after the trip. But the green of the field we walked across each morning to get to the breakfast hall stretches vast and boundless, like it has never ended. Maybe I am still stuck there, walking with new friends toward something I cannot yet see, a lighthouse shaped like a coffee cup. The dewy crunch of grass underfoot is a prod to move forward, to keep looking for lights even when the morning is too misty to see clearly. And when I find my way, that triumphantly ambrosian cup of coffee awaits me, and I know that my lights will not go out. I will not let them.

## PERHAPS THE WORLD ENDS HERE, TOO AFTER JOY HARJO

Ruben Smith

The world begins at the kitchen table, and of course, this could be true.

A tired mess of a family sit around the table and discuss what is to be done with her belongings, what is to be done with that chifforobe, that wood-burning heater, that flat-screen TV, those pig knick-knacks, this table. I sit in the corner, holding my hand in my hands, listening to the family discuss what other families did when their grandparent died, and nothing was willed away, how they devised almost game-like methods to divide the belongings among family. The cousin who is too old to refer to as cousin, so I just call her aunt, suggests a lottery of sorts where things get numbered throughout the house, and then each member draws a number and takes home their corresponding item. No fuss, no frills. That was her exact words.

My mother, the one who took care of my great-grandmother in the last five years of her life, doesn't want to hear any of these ideas, she just wants to bury the matriarch,

she wants to get over the funeral, then the worldly things. That's not how it went. Not at all.

While the suggestions and conversation continued—talk of land values, selling their inherited properties, successions—I looked at the table that everyone surrounded. My uncle had a chicken drumstick from Popeye's in his hand, and it made me think of when my great-grandmother would go to town and ask to stop by Popeye's on the way back. There was something she enjoyed about the flavor of spices they put on the chicken. She used to bring back the box to this same table, and we'd eat upon the chicken, all in laughter, happiness, and good merit.

Christmases and Thanksgivings used to hold value on this table, every family member that now surrounds the table in debate used to bring a covered dish or side, something that we all would enjoy. I remember discussing homemade pudding one time with my aunt as she dug into a seven-layer dessert. Even without the family moments three or four times a year, every Sunday would be

an intimate feast with my mother, my sister, myself, and my great-grandmother. All sorts of meals were connected to this table, even people before me were connected to this table, shared names, shared existences.

Your name could be discussed before you're even born into existence, your name a name of the past, a gentle reminder of what was lost. The world did not ask to be named, but it was, just as you didn't ask for your name, but you were, and now you wear the name everywhere you go. Could it be that I scratched my name here, in the underworking of that massive wood table, to remind myself that this was the origin of movement? Is this the involuntary notion of placing something bigger than myself down in wood, hoping for it to never be found by my great-grandmother or mother, yet praying that it should always remain as some reminder of who I am?

By the end of the family discourse and the breaking up of a family after the death my great-grandmother, the table was won by the cousin who I call aunt and sat un-



der her porch for almost two years. My mother often talked about the table, wondering what's being done with it, and then my sister decided to buy it for \$200. The table, today, sits in the carport of my sister's house, painted with some turquoise and white, aging in the weather, the wood split in places of maltreatment, and the chairs' glorious upholstery have all been tattered with only two of the original eight chairs remaining, painted in that same ghastly green and white. This was once a place of great people now under the confines of boxes and garbage and piles of various rusted tools. My sister wishes to restore the table to its former glory, but it will rot before that time comes. Even now, I wonder if my name is carved on the belly of this beast, but I dare not look, for then the purpose of the table has been lost, as it already has been.

My mother, a freshly lit cigarette loosely hanging from her lips, talks about how my sister needs to hurry up and fix the table before Thanksgiving or Christmas, but she's had the table for nearly three years of Thanksgivings

and Christmases. My mother explains how my sister is going through a hard time since my father passed away, that she needs family now more than ever, more than a table. I don't listen to these words of confusion and grief. Rather, I think back to the first memory I have of this table in my great-grandmother's house, the legs of the beast sitting on that yellowed linoleum floor, various heavy aluminum pots and dishes of food spread over a pristine white tablecloth with some floral stitching worked in.

My great-grandmother was usually seated at the head of the table on a cushion for her bony frame with her fingers, bent from years of sewing, cooking, farming, cleaning, and mending, resting in her lap, as she sat there and discussed family gossip, church gossip, and the life she had lived and planned to keep living. Her husband and son shared my name, and she is proud of this decision made by my mother, though there is often confusion when she speaks my name as to which of the three people she's referring to. My story could be entangled to the story of a

past life; again, this table's etching could prove something more about the passing of names and people. It could even prove something about the passing of family.

I had refused chicken and dumplings until I was forced to try them. I soon discovered that I enjoyed them and ate three bowls full at this table, my great-grandmother explaining how she used the same table to make her dumplings by hand, using newspaper covered in flour. We used to have fried fish in the summers after the "fish man" stopped by in his blue Jeep, a faithful dog companion always behind him, fried chicken in the winter after purchasing leg quarters on sale at the grocery store for near twenty-five cents a pound, smothered down squash or okra-and-tomatoes in the fall after a bountiful harvest from the garden that could be seen from the kitchen window, poke salad in the spring after having meticulously cutting and blanching and cooking the leaves of the dangerous plant. My great-grandmother used to share stories of floods, crops, animals, her parents, her children, and her

children's children, all over some meal she had prepared by hand, she had put love into.

The table, so much power. Perhaps Joy Harjo was right when she said that the world begins at a kitchen table, and yet it ends there. If I believed in a heaven, what would become of the table after it has rotted? Would my great-grandmother be up there, standing over a gas stove in the middle of summer, cooking some mustard greens and cream corn, ready to set it on the newly restored table, a tablecloth of pristine white laid, ready for the hot and delicious food?

To my surprise, at my nephew's birthday party this past summer, my sister set the cake on the table outside. She had cleared it off and made it something familiar. I watched my nephew blow out his candles on this table, watched him cling to the edge of the wood, holding himself up. What would happen if he scratched his name underneath the table? Would he see my name under there and marvel at how this table has made it one more generation?

# THE WATER CYCLE

Lili Bedoya

I am the pond that is scared to lose even one drop, trapped in its circular limits. Each new pebble is another mountain to climb, each tadpole leaves its mark in the mud that tethers me to the earth. And as the mud embraces me, it pulls me deeper until I am stuck, stuck, stuck. I grow roots of liquid, binding myself through the dirt and clay and anchoring down 'til I can feel the molten core of the earth begin to fight back, resisting this liquid infiltration. Every small fish takes up too much room, I'm full, I'm bursting, my roots are stuck and I can't move –

I long to often be the river; it surges forward, stopping for no one or thing. The pollutants that fill its waters make no difference; it continues, unmovable in the face of challenge, constant in the state of change. The creatures that flow through its depths are just visitors, not stopping for long until they are pushed far, far away. The river doesn't hold onto anything; it runs and runs away, splashing and screaming its way to newer worlds. It doesn't grow roots of liquid binding it to the earth, and it does not search for the



earth's innermost cores and crannies. It makes new paths and finds new ways to get away. People visit the river; they like the way its screaming sounds like a song to their ears.

Sometimes, on good days, I am a tender and cozy bath with softly glowing candles, lighting the walls ablaze—but it's a warm blaze, so much different from the searing heat that the pond finds and the river avoids. This flame is a familiar friend of mine, one that fills the bathroom with a dim, spotty hope, one that makes you consider washing the dishes later. The scent of cinnamon and coffee beans surrounds you, and the water is shallow but so inviting, still as a moment in time. The bath lets you live in a present, escape time's grasp for one soft moment while you lather, lather, lather, and try again later. The bath will be there for you again, one day, but for now I leak back into the drain, sliding down the pipes, searching for roots I once knew and new homes that are shaped like previous embodiments. Patterns are comforting, and even the water cycle revels in this perfect recipe, this delicate balance that the entire

world depends on.

And this world depends on a raindrop. The tiniest, sweetest little drop that reincarnates itself over and over just to experience that delicious fall to earth one more time. A drop that could land on your head as you curse yourself for forgetting an umbrella, a drop that can land on a dried-out plant that had lost all hope. A droplet of rain doesn't sound too comfortable, but you'd be surprised. Whereas the smallness of the pond is overfilled with the needs of others, a raindrop is just for you and you alone. This drop is for you, for anyone, for everyone. The drop comes ready to saturate where it is needed and especially where it is not. Inside of this infinitesimal drop in which all depends, I am cradled like a womb. There is almost no room for thought as the ground quickly approaches, and I am lost again, scattered throughout the earth, fighting my way back to my roots in the pond until I can be reborn once more, sacrificing myself to the cycle that hydrates the parched.

## WRESTLING

Ruben Smith

CW: Violence, Gun violence, Homophobia

The virtue of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess. This excess exists because of the grandeur of the show, the way men gather in droves, in dives, in bars, in covered patios, in empathic bodies riddled with liquor and the swelling rise of cigarette smoke, and they gaze at that spectacle, those massively deformed bodies motioning back and forth, man and man bleeding on stage, the real blood dripping down the canvas mat. Masculinity is beyond the spectacle, it's a foreign concept, a blended world of Neanderthals and ex-boyfriends, a frothy beer gone warm, and they drink it down and listen to every syllable described by the fast-talking commentators.

The stronger the man on stage, the more the men comment on their bodies, how genetics have been manipulated into something better than their own sons, and how they've been created into something beyond their own understandings of each other. They wipe their hands on their pants, allowing whatever sauce or salt that has attached itself there to be applied to their denim or cloth, a stain that

will come out in the wash the next morning, their wives dipping it in oxi-clean water, their manhood displayed and then dissolving. They crave the blood that could fall from the gashes on these brutes' faces but shy away from the blood that flows from their wives each month, shy away from the blood that is shed for their children, shy away from the sounds of bullets ripping through flesh and blood spilling out of innocent wounds, shy away from the blood of their cancer-ridden parents.

What's this happening now, something changing on the stage? Watch closely. The two men in tight-fitting clothes have become two different men in plaid shirts unbuttoned and solid-colored tees, their jeans loose on their bodies, and one of them holds a pistol while the other raises his balled fists. This is unusual; one of them looks determined while the other looks worried. The men sitting around the room do not comment on the scene occurring on stage; they have not noticed this change at all, until a young man—he's my age, in fact, something I can't shake

from my knowledge of these events we're all forced to see—is thrown into the ring. He is wearing a sweater, is skinny, and looks almost sickly. The two men jump at him, and he stumbles backwards in the ring. This is true wrestling.

One of the men takes the pistol and opens the guy's head with the butt of the gun, all of time spilling out in long red malaise. Is this the virtue of being gay, a wrestle with two men twice his size, a beating of being different, a reminder that he has the sickness that has plagued many like him, and each pistol whip or punch to the face reminds the two men thrashing him that they are in control of their bodies, of who lives and who dies and who is hung up in the outskirts of small-town Wyoming, head split open, tied up along a fence to look like a scarecrow? Hit him again, men would say, because he is not beat enough. He needs to pay for his body, for having the gay disease, for being who he is and will always be.

The two men depart from the stage and leave behind Matthew Shepard, tied to the side of the ring, his body limp,



but his breath is still there, life still inside, as if hope was trying to swell out of him. I watch along with the men, but most of them have gone back to their lives, forcing an ignorance towards the shallow-breathing body on the stage. Their wrestling spectacle is over, but I disagree entirely. For eighteen hours, I watch this beautiful man breathe. He is still wrestling, right? He is fighting on the stage, his body bloodied, his head a cracked open egg. He is still struggling, the insides of him awaiting their final breath and release from what it is that binds us to this world. The men have shied away, refusing to look upon him, and he is still there, his name written in bold lettering all over the world, candles lit, his name spoken in prayers of saddened parents, his name spoken in the prayers of lovers, his name spoken. Men do not listen here.

Something is happening on the stage, something quite different. It's me, standing up there, and the crew has cleared off the body. I'm wearing a dress, high heels, a wig, lipstick. I don't entirely recall what this was, but it

was an imitation of some spy movie I had seen, something where a man wears a disguise as a woman. Where's my father during this? High and with his other woman? Working in some field, his hands bloodied or dirty? My mother is awaiting me to exit the room in my get-up, I can remember that. I'm somewhere around the age of 9 or 10 years old. I stand in the gaudy dress that belongs to my sister and look in the mirror on stage, mesmerized by how I look in something so feminine. I belong.

But queerness is a wrestling match. Coming from the other side, my father, in his grease-covered work shirt, hands callused and bruised, stands in front of me. I'm still in the disguise, but he looks at me with worried eyes, his hand lifting in the air and bringing down a Bible. Man was made for woman. Woman was made for man. Any man that lies with another man, that is an abomination, as for womankind. I do not rebuttal. I do not retreat. I stand firm in my high heels and move around the stage. Then my mother, in a floral-print shirt and a skirt to her ankles, comes from be-

hind my father and begins to cry towards me. It's a phase. It's a phase you'll grow out of. It's something that will pass like a storm, like a hurricane blowing strong. You'll make a mistake and become something you're not.

My parents disappear, and a mirror is lowered in cabaret style, flashing bulbs all around it. The dress is stripped from me, revealing my naked body, the body I wake up with every morning, and the crowd roars with their laughter and ridicule. You're not normal. You're not beautiful. You're not Brad Pitt. You're not even Michael Sheppard. You're a queer, but you don't have the body to match. I watch as these slurs surpass the mouths of these drunken fools, their bottles getting low with the evening's rush of manhood.

I look at the mirror and wished myself pretty. There, before me, a six-pack, there, before them, a man. There, before me, a penis of reputable size, there, before them, a woman pleaser. There, before me, a jawline marked with facial hair so kempt, there, before them, a trait of beauty. I watch the mirror warp and bend and wobble, the glass

becoming putty in some places, and beauty seeping down. Men shouldn't have to see these things, but there it is, the mirror says so. Mirror, mirror, on the stage, who is the man of this age? "Not you," it answers back, a voice so hollow it's almost unheard. I'm led to the front of the stage by some band of musicians with rock guitars and spikey hair and heavy chains. We begin to sing some song about queer-ness and the self and the body and how my father didn't love me enough, so now I'm the way I am, and how there's no cure for this disease everyone says I'm afflicted with.

The men begin to get up by this point, the wrestle of self, something mystical and foreign now; they don't want to see this wrestling of man's inner self and the outer self. They'd rather stay home and listen to their significant other complain about the lack of ketchup in the refrigerator, listen to some old cousin tell them about how they almost got caught by the cops drinking and driving, listen to their kids tell them about how school curriculums are changing, and this new one is sure to get it right, listen to the television

set explain how there's a war so close to home, you could practically smell the bodies burning and the sergeant's yell, listen to their parents complain about how the Costco rearranged their aisles, so the peas and carrots are now on the opposite side of where it had originally been, listen to some baby cry in the park because his mother can't explain the concept of germs on a dropped candy bar, listen to the silence that fills their bathrooms in the morning, as they stare in their own mirrors, wondering if they had left behind something long ago, and this is what they're left with.



**ROT****Carly Chandler**

CW: Gore, Body horror

As soon as the performer's heels hit the center of the stage, the crowd erupts in joyous laughter, heads thrown back as they clap for the introduction to the performance. There was little surprise within the audience as the actor carried out their movements, considering this form of dance had been all the rage this year. There was an unspoken rule that the events were not to be recorded; rather, they were to be enjoyed in a live setting, for the exclusivity just made them that much more enjoyable. This particular theater was designed to house as many people as possible in a limited amount of space. Elbows rub and shoulders brush as the performer begins their dance on stage – there are only fifty people in attendance tonight, but the performance was sold out for months prior.

Everyone who was anyone had been to at least one of the plays, and the critics' reviews pointed to a long, healthy relationship between the stage and this new, innovative form of movement. Every single member of the audience had seen silly old puppet shows before tonight,

but the main star of the show was something new.

Of course, they were unrecognizable, considering the vast amounts of makeup caked on their cheeks, the heavy red lines around their lips forcing a clownish smile. The members of the audience laugh still when they hear the crack of the performer's knee, and they nearly keel over with merriment when the performer's leg bends at such an awkward, unnatural angle, forcing the stringed dancer to lurch forward.

The strings around their arms and shoulders keep them from face planting into the stained wooden floors, but it didn't stop the skin from splitting where the bone forced its way free. From the knee below, the leg dangled comically, barely held by the metaphorical thread of skin and tendon and muscle. Blood leaks out of the wound, slow and thick, dripping over the stains on the wooden floor. The actor isn't dead enough for the blood to have clotted yet.

There's a faux spine made of plywood on their back that the audience can't see – their neck hangs limp, but

their torso is kept ramrod straight. Their legs, on the other hand, are pulled back up so quickly that it sends the audience into another fit of laughter behind their masks and their feathered hand fans.

Most of the condensable fans were beaded with small pearls, as is the trend this winter season, and the most innovative, desirable thing to be was to be like everyone else. The dresses in the room, however, were threaded with blue and green, and the suits were all a classic cream, embroidered in silver. Though these are typically summer patterns, the dark takes on the classic sea foams and teals and mauves filled the room with a forced oceanic appearance, directly opposing the reds and golds of the theatre setting. Regardless of the differences in style, deep pockets are sewn into every coat, skirt, and shirt in the room, each filled to the brim with posies of varying styles – the most popular flower for personal bouquets this month were dahlias, for their “fair fragrance and lingering aroma, a breath of spring could fill your pockets!”

A vast majority of those in attendance not only paid for their dahlias thrice over but also for their tickets, all to watch the clumsy corpse with a barely-attached leg be pulled left and right and back again across the stage.

That morning, the actor's lips had been sewn shut, along with coins behind their eyes, so they wouldn't be able to utter a word onstage or lose their way after the show. Just after their organs were removed, to ensure an easy, weightless effect, the makeup artist insisted that the mortuary team not remove the blood, as it would take that much more "youthful, liveliness" from the performance. Regardless, after the powders had been applied and the performer attached to the strings and harness on stage, the blood drained to their feet, swelling and pulling the life from their face. To counteract the rigid, involuntary tightening of the body, induced by the wintry chill that had since been rectified in the theater, a stagehand was asked to come remove the knots from their hands, their joints, to give them a lifelike means of swinging around with every

thrust of the marionettists' wrists.

As the actor's neck is slowly pulled back, letting the head lull back, the freshly stitched cut on their chest visible yet ignored, the audience's laughter turns muted, stiff. The actor's arms raise, and a for a moment, their legs do too, and the corpse is strung to the heavens, floating half a foot above the stained floorboards.

The odor from the incision in the actor's chest to their abdomen is poorly masked by daisies and oil-based perfumes that can't hide the metallic stench the audience opts to ignore as the actor is lowered back down, one shoe clapping against the floor, the other not quite hitting it hard enough for anyone to hear it over the soft music playing.

The audience applauds the performer, dahlias and daisies and roses incapable of masking the stench of rotting teeth, of skin slipping off the muscle, of ugly faces hidden behind masks and hand fans embroidered with pearls.

And the corpse is pulled this way and that, taking



clumsy steps and lurching wherever the marionettists decide to abruptly tug them around. There was a message, being hastily penned two and a half miles away, intended to be pressed into the hands of a messenger as blood dripped down the intended scribe's throat, a handkerchief hastily pressed to their mouth as they tried to explain, they truly, really did, but there was no messenger to deliver the letter.

The corpse, before their stunning debut as a stage dancer, lived alone in a small flat. They'd been out of work for months now, turned to desperate measures—desperate measures meant desperate actions, and they resorted to eating an unnaturally large rat that had been plaguing them for days.

The rat, before it'd been ingested by the corpse, had eaten poison lain out to kill it just forty minutes prior and scurried off to the small apartment building to die alone. Instead of dying alone, as anticipated, it died as a meal, killing the performer.

And when the mortuary staff cut the chest open six hours later, the chemical already permeated the stomach, the heart, and the bloodstream. While the vapors were enough to kill all four of the staff members who dissected the body, plus the makeup artist who prepared them, it required time and optimal conditions.

An hour and a condensed space.

As the corpse, clumsily stitched back together, was strewn around the stage, permeating the room with an odorless, sickening death, the characters in the seat played their parts, laughing in spite of their headaches, in spite of the chest pain, for this was the event of the year, and to leave now would be a scandal in each attendee's own right.

When the headaches turned to dizziness and coughs, the marionette stopped being pulled each way, that way and this. In an instant, in such a way that would have sent the audience into another fit of laughter, the actor collapses to the ground, the artificial spine snapping loudly, muted by the coughs that were only growing in severity.

They fall like flies, one by one, clawing at their constricting corsets and the masks on their faces, revealing hollow cheeks and swollen boils, gaps in their mouths and white, chapped lips.

They hang over seats and lie on the ground, aiming for the door but unable to trample over the bodies before the contamination tipped them over the edge. Even as the corpse lies there, the stench of death muted, all anyone could smell was dahlias and daisies and rot.





**PHOTO  
GRAPHY**

**+**

**FINE  
ARTS**



# CURIOUS EYES

Madison Szekely









# AMAZING GRACE

Anna Poe













# MELTED MEMORIES

Lili Bedoya

PHOTOGRAPHY



# ARROGANCE OF ICARUS

Jairon Pitts



FINE ARTS



## SOCIAL MEDIA ABUSE

Kailyn Frederick



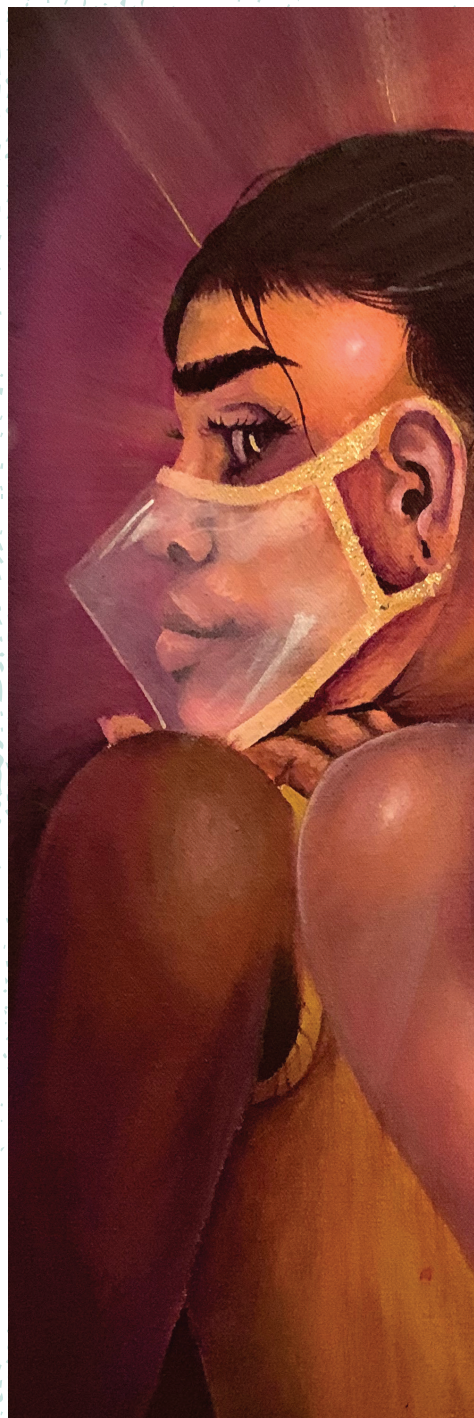






# UNDERNEATH THE MASK

Naje Turner







# CONTEST

# WINNERS

## POETRY

**1ST** Greed  
Carly Chandler

**2ND** My Lover as an Architect  
Shari Wilson

**3RD** Mahogany  
Anonymous

## PROSE

**1ST** Wrestle  
Ruben Smith

**2ND** Secrets are for People who  
have Something to Hide  
Kaylon Willoughby

**3RD** Perhaps the World Ends  
Here, Too  
Ruben Smith

## PHOTOGRAPHY

**1ST** Curious Eyes  
Madison Szekely

**2ND** Amazing Grace  
Anna Poe

**3RD** Melted Memories  
Lili Bedoya

## FINE ARTS

**1ST** Arrogance of Icarus  
Jairon Pitts

**2ND** Social Media Abuse  
Kailyn Frederick

**3RD** Underneath the Mask  
Naje Turner